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SUBJECT: REFUGEES IN NAMIBIA: IMPENDING FOOD CRISIS AMIDST DURABLE
SOLUTIONS

REF: WINDHOEK 00285

Summary

¶1. (U) The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the GRN's Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration (MHAI) made a joint presentation to representatives from the diplomatic community in Windhoek on September 4 concerning durable solutions for the integration or resettlement of 8000 refugees residing in Namibia. At the meeting, a representative from the World Food Program (WFP) also outlined starkly an emerging food security crisis at the Osire Refugee Camp and pled for international donor support. The group of 41 Congolese refugees, who voluntarily left the Osire Refugee Camp in July, remain at the Namibia-Botswana border (reftel). They are now under the care of the Government of Botswana while their status and request for entrance into Botswana is being reviewed.

Durable Solutions Proposed

¶2. (U) On September 4, the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration (MHAI), Samuel Goagoseb, and the country representative for UNHCR, Joyce Mends-Cole, made a joint presentation outlining durable solutions, which had been agreed upon in principle by UNHCR and the GRN, for the integration or resettlement of the Osire refugees. The three primary avenues are: (1) voluntary repatriation and reintegration of refugees to their countries of origin, (2) local integration into the current country of residence, and (3) resettlement in third countries.

¶3. (U) With the caveat that no one may be "forced" to repatriate to his/her country of origin, Mends-Cole stated that the first two options would be emphasized in Namibia, as third-country resettlement is a viable option for only a small minority of the refugees. She announced the gradual implementation of cessation clauses for Angolan refugees in 2010, due to improved stability and conditions in Angola. While UNHCR has recently facilitated the return of some Angolans, the majority of refugees resident in Namibia - about 5000 of the total 8000 - are still Angolan (reftel).

¶4. (U) Both presenters emphasized the importance of a comprehensive policy approach for both local integration and repatriation strategies, which would address all aspects of the process - legal, economic, and socio-cultural. Legal considerations for repatriates would include documentation for those who no longer have identification from their country of origin and for those who may have been born into refugee status. For those integrating locally, legal provision would mean the expansion of rights, resident status, and freedom of movement. Economic provisions for both groups would facilitate and require increased self-reliance on the part of refugees, such as through job training or credentialing those with professional skills. Socio-cultural considerations relate to

reasonable freedom from discrimination or exploitation, and opportunities to contribute to national development, as former refugees seek to integrate with society.

¶15. (U) Mends-Cole laid out a "target" timeline in which a comprehensive local integration policy will be drafted for review by December 2009 and formally presented to Parliament in April 2010. The Permanent Secretary qualified this statement, noting that only policy "recommendations" could be drafted and thus the process may take longer. He added that the MHAI has begun issuing "non-citizen" birth certificates as documentation for refugees.

Food Security Crisis at Osire Camp

¶16. (U) Also at the September 4 meeting, WFP representative Baton Osmani briefed the diplomatic community on the "continued shrinking of available resources across the board" and the allocation of those resources to crises or areas that have garnered more international attention. Osmani warned of an emerging food crisis at the Osire Refugee Camp. He noted that the WFP had been supplying full rations to the refugees at Osire since 2000 in partnership with the GRN, at an on-going cost of approximately USD 80,000 per month. As the WFP had received no new donations since 2008 and had "failed" to acquire new donor commitments, Osmani projected a shortfall of about 164 metric tons of food in the last quarter of 2009 (costing roughly USD 120,000).

¶17. (U) In an effort to prevent fraud or abuse of the distribution system, WFP introduced I.D. and ration cards in 2008 and also began reducing or eliminating rations for camp inhabitants who were

employed and demonstrably able to provide for their own needs. WFP has also cut sugar and oil rations by 50 percent in an effort to stretch resources. While full food rations have been authorized for September 2009, they will have to be cut by half in October in order to maintain some level of supply for the remainder of the year.

¶18. (U) In a subsequent discussion on September 8, Osmani indicated that he is hoping to receive new pledges of support from the international community as a result of his presentation. He has also made direct appeals to the highest levels of the GRN for assistance. If the GRN makes a new commitment, the WFP will

publicize the donation and press the international community further, "possibly" followed by direct appeals to individual governments who have a stated or historical interest in the Osire refugees.

The Congolese 41 Still in Limbo

¶19. (U) Representatives from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) inquired into the status of 41 Congolese refugees who voluntarily left the Osire Refugee Camp on July 8. Both the Permanent Secretary and UNHCR representative made it clear that the claims by the group of death threats and maltreatment by the GRN were investigated and determined to be unsubstantiated. Goagoseb reasserted the GRN's position that these individuals had broken Namibian law and would not be re-admitted to Namibia, even if they should desire to return.

Mends-Cole stated that UNHCR had provided food, water and other supplies for the group as they initially camped at the border between Namibia and Botswana, but she added that the Botswana government had taken over this responsibility while it reviewed the refugees' status and request for entrance into the country. The refugees will remain where they are until Botswana makes a formal ruling on their case.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) It is unclear to what degree real progress on a comprehensive local integration policy may be made in the coming year. UNHCR emphasized its commitment to develop policy recommendations for local integration as a viable and durable solution, and also noted that there is a "green light" from the

President and a Cabinet mandate to do so. However, upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in November and Namibia's continuing economic downturn may impede quick progress. On the other hand, the food crisis at Osire may elicit a more immediate response.

ACTION REQUEST

¶11. (U) Post would appreciate notification should the Department decide to allocate funds to WFP specifically for the Osire Refugee Camp.